

innocent and vulnerable in our country. We ask Him to protect our Nation from those who wish us harm and watch over all who've stepped forward to defend us. We ask Him to bring about the day when His peace shall reign across the world and every tear shall be wiped away.

In prayer, we grow in mercy and compassion. We are reminded in prayer that we are all fallen creatures in need of mercy. And in seeking God's mercy, we grow in mercy ourselves. Experiencing the presence of God transforms our hearts. And the more we seek His presence, the more we feel the tug at our souls to reach out to the poor and the hungry, the elderly and the infirm. When we answer God's call to love a neighbor as ourselves, we enter into a deeper friendship with our fellow man and a deeper relationship with our eternal Father.

I believe in the power of prayer because I have felt it in my own life. Prayer has strengthened me in times of personal challenge. It has helped me meet the challenges of the Presidency. I understand now clearly the story of the calm in the rough seas. And so at this final prayer breakfast as your President, I thank you for your prayers, and I thank our people all across America for their prayers. And I ask you not to stop in the year ahead. We have so much work to do for our country, and with the help of the Almighty, we will build a freer world and a safer, more hopeful, more noble America.

God bless.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:16 a.m. at the Hilton Washington Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Adm. Michael G. Mullen, USN, Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff; Edward "Ward" Brehm, Chairman of the Board of Directors, United States African Development Foundation; entertainer Michael W. Smith and his wife, Debbie; and Carlos F. Lucero, U.S. Circuit Judge for the Tenth Circuit Court of Appeals.

Remarks on Nominations Awaiting Senate Confirmation

February 7, 2008

Thank you all. Please be seated. Thanks for coming. I appreciate you being here in a timely fashion. After all, Washington traffic

is famous for making people late. These days, it seems the worst delays, however, are in the committee rooms of the United States Senate.

Many of the nominees for important Government posts have been waiting for Senate confirmation for way too long. Some of these men and women here—are with us today, and I want to thank you all for joining me. More importantly, I thank you for your willingness to step forward to serve our great country. These folks are qualified, and the Senate needs to give them a prompt vote.

I appreciate very much Members of the Senate who have joined us. These are good, strong leaders, people who share the same spirit about the need to get confirmation done quickly, starting with the Senate minority leader, Mitch McConnell. I appreciate Arlen Specter joining us. You might remember Arlen that when—Arlen was the man, when I named two nominees for the Supreme Court, did a fantastic job of getting those nominees out of the Judiciary Committee and onto the floor of the Senate. And he had good help from Orrin Hatch, his friend and member of the Judiciary Committee.

I'm also here with some of the younger stars—not to call you guys old—but some of the younger stars—[laughter]—of the Senate: Richard Burr from North Carolina, Lindsey Graham from South Carolina, and Jim DeMint from South Carolina. Thank you all for coming. Appreciate you guys being here.

I thank members of my administration joining us. Steve, thanks for being here. Chief of Staff Bolten, I appreciate you being here. And thank you all for coming.

As President, I have a constitutional responsibility to nominate qualified men and women for public office. That's my responsibility. I take it very seriously. I have nominated skilled and faithful public servants to lead Federal Agencies and sit on the Federal bench. The Constitution also gives Senators an important responsibility. They must provide advice and consent by voting up or down on these nominees. Unfortunately, the Senate is not fulfilling its duty.

The confirmation process has turned into a never-ending political game where everyone loses. With more than 180 of my nominees waiting for the confirmation process in the Senate, it is clear that the process is not working. About half these nominees have been waiting for more than 100 days. More than 30 have been waiting a year or more. And nine have been waiting for more than 2 years.

That's no way to treat men and women who have stepped forward to serve our country, and it's got to stop. It's in our Nation's interest that this process change. It's not right to treat these good folks this way. These nominees deserve an up-or-down vote. Many of them have had their careers on hold. They've got spouses whose lives are stuck in limbo. They have children waiting to find out where they're going to go to school.

These are real folks making real sacrifices, and they should not be treated like political pawns. Senators should examine every nomination closely, but they should not drag them out indefinitely. If the Senators holding up this process believe my nominees are unworthy for confirmation, the course of action is clear: Hold a vote, and see if the majority agree. If these nominees are not approved, they can move on with their lives. If they are approved, they can take office.

The confirmation backlog also places this strain on our Government. Every day nominees are delayed represents another day without them in office, and that makes it harder for the Government to meet its responsibilities. The nomination before the Senate—these nominations before the Senate are vital positions—or for vital positions affecting issues from the economy to public safety to national security.

The Senate must confirm nominees who help guide our economy during a time of uncertainty. The Senate has stalled nominations for critical economic positions. I mean, we've got—we're dealing with uncertainty, and there are key positions that are not being filled.

The three-member Council of Economic Advisers is down to one person, which makes for lonely Council meetings. *[Laughter]* One of my nominees for the Council withdrew his name after 6 months of waiting without

receiving so much as a hearing. My other nominee continues to wait after 7 months of delay. At a time of important decisions for our economy, it is irresponsible for the United States Senate to leave these positions unfulfilled.

One of the most important institutions for the American economy is the Federal Reserve. The Fed decides monetary policy, and it sets key interest rates that have an impact on homeowners and businesses across our country. Yet the Senate is delaying confirmation of three highly qualified nominees for the Fed's Board of Governors. I nominated these individuals nearly 9 months ago. They have valuable experience and skills, and the Senate needs to confirm them as soon as possible.

The Senate also must confirm nominees who will help address issues of public safety. The Federal Aviation Administration plays a vital role in keeping air travelers safe. Yet the Senate has failed to act on my nominee to head this Agency. In October, I nominated Bobby Sturgell to lead the FAA. Bobby has nearly 20 years of cockpit experience from his time as a Navy fighter pilot, Top Gun instructor, and commercial airline pilot. He is committed to addressing problems that have caused airline delays, and he has good experience and the skills necessary to get the job done.

I appreciate the Senate commerce committee giving Bobby a hearing today. I urge the Senators to put aside politics and confirm this good man to office. It's important for the country that he be confirmed. If they don't like him, vote him down, but at least give him a vote as soon as possible.

The Senate has also failed to act on my nominations for the Federal Mine Safety and Health Review Commission. As a result of the Senate's ongoing delays, this body can no longer decide cases because it has more vacancies than members. Two of my nominees for the Commission have gone more than a year without even receiving a confirmation hearing. The American people have not forgotten the recent mining tragedies in Kentucky and West Virginia and Utah, and they expect this Commission to have enough members to issue decisions on mine safety.

The Senate must also confirm nominees who will help protect America's national security. In this time of war, we need a strong Department of Justice. Yet the Senate has not voted on seven nominations for senior leadership positions at the Department. I remember being criticized for having too many vacancies at the Justice Department. We stepped up. We sent good names up, and now it's time for those critics to act.

One of the vacancies is for Deputy Attorney General. The Deputy Attorney General helps lead efforts to detect and prevent terrorist attacks here at home. I've selected an outstanding nominee for this position, Judge Mark Filip. I'm sorry that he's not here. He's dealing with a serious family matter. This former prosecutor has earned a reputation for being fairminded and dedicated.

Several years ago, the Senate confirmed him unanimously for a lifetime position on the Federal bench. In other words, this isn't the first time he's gone through a confirmation process. If the Senate can confirm this good man for a lifetime post, there's no reason the Senate cannot confirm him to spend the next year protecting the American people. Yet one Senator has placed a hold on this nomination because of an issue that has nothing to do with the judge. This is unacceptable. Senators need to base their decisions on the judge's qualifications for the job; they need to bring this nomination to the floor for a vote; and they need to confirm this good man.

As Senators confirm these nominees, they also must confirm judges to the Federal bench. I've nominated good men and women who will rule by the letter of the law, not the whim of the gavel. I thank the Senators on both sides of the aisle, like Mitch McConnell, Jon Kyl and Arlen and Dianne Feinstein and Thad Cochran, for helping confirm fine judges like Leslie Southwick.

Unfortunately, some of their colleagues continue to delay votes for 28 of my other nominees. The Senate has sat on these nominations to the court of appeals for nearly 600 days. And in some cases, the Senate has imposed a new and extra constitutional standard where nominees who have the support of the majority of the Senate can be blocked by a minority of obstructionists. As a result, some

judgeships can go unfulfilled for years and justice can be delayed for the American people.

Our courts should render swift decisions. That's what we expect, and so should the United States Senate. Many of my nominees would fill urgent vacancies on courts that are understaffed and overworked. I've sent the Senate three nominees to relieve such a situation on the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals. Bob Conrad and Steve Matthews and Rod Rosenstein are with us today. These are my nominees. They are accomplished members of the legal community. They will be outstanding members of this court. Yet the Senate has not acted on their nominations. This delay is irresponsible. It undermines the cause of justice. And the United States Senate needs to bring every one of my judicial nominations to the floor for an up-or-down vote.

When men and women agree to serve in public office, we should treat them with respect and dignity. When the Senate fails to do this, it leaves important positions in our Government vacant for months at a time, and it makes it harder for future Presidents to be able to attract good people to serve the United States of America.

We've got to—I'm really grateful for the many talented and dedicated and patriotic men and women who have answered the call to service. And now my call to the United States Senate is this: Rise to your responsibilities; give these nominees the vote they deserve; and confirm them as soon as possible.

Thank you for coming.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:50 a.m. in the East Room at the White House.

Remarks on Signing the Executive Order to Improve the Coordination and Effectiveness of Youth Programs

February 7, 2008

Thank you all. Thanks. Please be seated. Thank you for joining Laura and me. I've got two jobs. One is I'm going to sign an